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ABSTRACT

Focusing on one of the most critical and complex aspects of the concept of the regional educational service agency (RESA), the paper questions whether RESA's should be an arm of the state educational agency, pure creatures of constituent local school districts, or pure special district governments. The critical dimensions of the issue being discussed are the principal needs of healthy state systems of elementary-secondary education; the role and function of state education agencies; the primary needs of the local school district; and the essential governance and organizational requirements of service units. Potential points of conflict are given, such as how local districts can have substantial and meaningful input into the workings of the service unit if the activities of the latter are subject to review by the state education agency. The proposed solution to the problem is establishing, by statute, a statewide network of regional units to which all state school districts must belong. The explanation of the proposed solution additionally covers its establishment, governance and organization, financial structure, programs and services, and regulatory functions for the state education agency. Some specifics on the service-regulatory mix and major advantages of the model are also covered. (KM)

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1960's, the sub-state regional educational service agency (RESA) concept has been seriously examined in approximately three-fourths of the states as an alternative for the improvement of local school district educational delivery systems. In a substantial majority of these instances, the concept has been implemented. That is, in the past approximate decade in nearly one-half of the fifty states there has been established either a statewide network of bonefide regional educational service agencies or a partial statewide network. In many of these cases, the regional educational service unit was restructured from a former middle echelon unit, most typically the county school system. Thus, the concept in many important ways is one of the biggest movements in school government in this nation at the present time (Stephens, 1973).

This paper will not examine the major precipitating causes for the widespread interest in the concept, the method of establishment and development in the several states which have implemented it, or the major programming, staffing, and fiscal arrangements of regional educational service agency operation. Nor will it treat in a direct way the prior question of whether or not a state should in fact have some form of a regional service unit or three-level structure. Rather, my charge is to focus on one of the most critical and complex aspects of the concept -- that is, should RESA's be an arm of the state education agency, pure creatures of constituent local school districts, or pure special district governments? This charge assumes that, in most state school systems, a need does exist for a form of school government setting between the state education agency and collections of local school districts.

This central governance issue, in my judgment, is fundamental to all other questions concerning the organizational, programming, and fiscal aspects of regional educational service agency arrangements. Indeed, it is the first question that needs to be dealt with by educational and political planners and decision-makers. And until a clear consensus is reached on this central point, the debate over the method of establishment, what programs and services are to be offered, voluntary vs. mandatory participation, fiscal independence or fiscal dependency, and other important issues is meaningless. Some of the best evidence that can be offered that this is true is the organizational dysfunctions of many operating RESA units in numerous states. A close observer of these units would quickly conclude that a principal reason for their present dilemma was the failure, early in the formulation stage, to adequately address this issue or the ready willingness to put it aside for political expediency. This decision has been fatal or near fatal to these units.

This paper will address the issue by first briefly establishing the critical dimensions of the issue as I perceive these to be, then highlighting the major potential points of conflict, and concluding with a proposed solution to the issue and the identification of its major advantages. It will be noted that the central thesis of this paper is that a structurally sound and healthy regional educational service agency can and should represent the interests of both masters -- the state education agency and constituent local school districts. That is, in most state school systems it can be both an important, but highly selective, link in the operation of the regulatory arrangements which must be maintained in a state school system and can simultaneously provide essential programs and services of high quality to

member local school districts in the consortia in a non-threatening way. Furthermore, it will be argued that the interface between the two roles, regulatory and service, is essential in many important ways for all three parties in the act -- the state education agency, the local school district, and the regional educational service agency. Moreover, the state school system will prosper in many obvious and highly potential ways because of the interface.

ESTABLISHING THE CRITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ISSUE

What are the pervasive, dominant considerations that educational and political planners and decision-makers must keep in mind in seeking solutions to the complex issue of the optimal governance and organizational affiliation of regional educational service agencies? In my judgment, the major parameters of the issue have to do with the following: what are the principal needs of healthy state systems of elementary-secondary education?; what is to be the role and function of state education agencies in the resolution of the principal needs of state systems of elementary-secondary education?; what are the principal considerations of one of the chief consumers, the local school districts, in entering into and maintaining a workable relationship with an external service agency of whatever type -- a creature of its own making, a pure special district government, or the state education agency?; and, what are the essential governance and organizational requirements of healthy regional educational service agencies?

Time and space constraints preclude a detailed discussion of these four clusters of considerations and I will therefore necessarily limit my remarks to a brief overview of each. Even without these constraints the search for answers to these questions, or other similar questions, is, of course, hindered by a number of conceptual and methodological problems. And, as I am certain you will recognize, answers to these questions might vary significantly from one state school system to another. Nonetheless, let me briefly attempt to do so. And I will further limit my comments in each of the four clusters of considerations to the consensus views found in the literature which are of most significance to the topic of this paper.

The Principal Needs of Healthy State Systems of Elementary-Secondary Education

In recognition of the need to look first at the total state school system rather than pieces of that system whatever its configuration, I would like to focus on this topic first. Statements on the needs of state systems of elementary-secondary education have multiplied considerably in recent years. The literature is abundant with profiles of educational needs in each of the fifty states and statements of needs applicable generally to the status of elementary-secondary education in all of the states.

While the terminology and mode of expression varies from one statement to the next, a student of school government quickly detects repeated reference to the following unranked, common needs which are of particular importance to the topic of this paper: the need to equalize and extend educational opportunities for all children and youth in the state system of education; the need to successfully implement the "new technology" in educational processes;

the need to improve the quality of educational practice; the need to equalize the financial costs of education; the need to develop, test, and implement a more relevant curricula; the need to invest substantial resources in the training and retraining of educational personnel; the need for a sophisticated dissemination network to announce and hasten the implementation of effective educational practice; the need to establish a valid research, development, and evaluation network; the need to administer and deliver educational programs and services in the most efficient and effective manner possible and that educational programming reflect sound cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness principles; the need to develop new mechanisms to promote a healthy interface at all levels among the units of school government and between school government, general government, and the private sector; the need to establish a viable structure of school government as an important prerequisite for the development and maintenance of a sound state system of education; and, the need to develop meaningful long-range planning and technical capabilities.

The Role and Function of State Education Agencies

As was true of the first cluster of considerations, the second, the role and function of state education agencies in the resolution of the principal needs of state systems of elementary and secondary education, has also been the subject of an increasing volume of pronouncements. A review of some of the best of the literature on both the historical posture (Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee, 1965; Layton, 1967; Collins, 1969; and, Harris, 1973), and

emerging trends of state education agencies (Campbell and Sroufe, 1967; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1968; and, Hansen and Morphet, 1968) suggests that there is a consensus that the states ought to assume as their primary missions the following functions: the provision of long-range planning, research and development, and evaluation; the identification of educational needs; the provision of leadership in communicating educational problems and recommended solutions to the legislative and executive branches of state government and to the public; the provision of statewide communicative and coordinative networks; the development of programs and procedures for the equitable financing of education; the development of performance standards and a companion regulatory framework for the optimal operation of educational delivery systems; and, the concentration of the leadership mission for statewide planning and development.

The Primary Needs of the Local School District

The third cluster of considerations, the needs and interests of one of the ultimate consumers of the external service agency activities, the local school district, must also be dominant in the debate over structural configurations. A review of the available literature of this critical dimension of the issue suggests that the following concerns are uppermost in the perceptions of local school district officials: the provision of external efforts which are based on the needs of local districts; the provision of external efforts which complement and support the activities of the local district and are not in competition with or duplicate the activities of the local unit; the

provision of external efforts of high quality in staffing and programming; the provision of external efforts which are definite, reliable, and accessible; the provision of external efforts which are sensitive to the recognizable varying environments under which the local school district must function; and, the provision of mechanisms which make possible the substantial involvement of the local unit in the planning and decision-making processes of the external service unit.

The Essential Governance and Organizational Requirements of Service Units

Effective service units also have need for carefully arranged governance and organizational configurations. There appears to be a substantial consensus in the literature on regional educational service agencies and on special district governments generally concerning the following aspects which are of most importance to the topic of this paper: state education agencies should have sole authority to approve the establishment of service units and develop rules, regulations, and standards for their operation; service units should be governed by a popularly elected board having a degree of flexibility and authority to develop its own rules and regulations subject to the policies of the state education agency, and statutory and constitutional considerations; service units should enjoy significant fiscal independence and fiscal integrity; the basic programming orientation of service units should be the provision of programs and services to constituent local school districts; service units should not engage in the enforcement of rules and regulations of the state education agency; service

units should be authorized to offer any program or service to constituent local units, subject to the approval of the state education agency; all constituent local school districts should be eligible for the programs and services of the service unit but participation should be on a voluntary basis; service units should be accessible to their constituency; service units should be accountable to their constituency; service units should possess unmatched staffing and programming capabilities; and, service units should be legitimate members of the state system of education, that is, they must be viewed as a public corporation possessing all the legal trappings of a public body.

Summary

These, then, are some of the critical dimensions of the issue as I perceive them to be. I have not thus far considered in a direct way other important aspects of the problem such as the optimal arrangements for the allocation of functions in a state system of education or the identification of assumptions about the future, although these two matters in particular will be at least referred to in later sections of the paper.

THE MAJOR POTENTIAL POINTS OF CONFLICT

In the establishment of an effective system for the provision of programs and services to local school districts, planners and decision-makers must be sensitive to and accommodate the following unranked highly potential conflicting needs and requirements, stated in question form.

1. Will the provision of supplementary programs and services to marginal and ineffective local school districts contribute to the perpetuation of such units, thus retarding the establishment of a sound structural system of education within the state school system?
2. Can service units be provided a high degree of fiscal independence, as recommended in the literature, and still maintain a position of noncompetitiveness to constituent units and/or, perhaps more importantly, engage in only those activities deemed important by the member units?
3. How can service units intervene in the working of constituent local districts having known deficiencies in a nonthreatening way if, as the literature suggests, participation is to be voluntary?
4. Would not another unit of government sitting between the local district and the state education agency inhibit rather than promote the desired vertical and horizontal communication and coordination in the state system?
5. How can local districts have substantial and meaningful input into the workings of the service unit, as opted for overwhelmingly in the literature, if the activities of the latter are subject to review by the state education agency, as also recommended in the literature? Furthermore, how can external service agents be accountable to constituent districts under such arrangements?

The above questions are representative of the complexities, competing needs, and dilemmas briefly illustrated in the enumeration of the principal needs of a state system of education, the emerging role and function of state education agencies, the primary concerns of the local school district, and acceptable governance and organizational standards of service units alluded to previously.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA

I would now like to propose a solution to the issue which, in my judgment, pays attention to and reconciles a majority of the considerations previously outlined, particularly the most central ones. The solution is in the form of a model service unit. And I want to emphasize that in my judgment the proposed model is appropriate for implementation in a vast majority of state school systems in this nation as is, it then follows, the concept of the regional educational service agency. After presenting the profile of the model, a brief discussion will be presented highlighting the major benefits of the proposal for each of the three parties in the proposed arrangements.

Major Features of the Proposed Model

I want now to move to the presentation of a profile of the model. To be emphasized in the profile are the following: establishment provisions, highlights of the governance and organizational aspects of the model, its

major financial bases, its major programs and services, and the essential features of the regulatory mission of the proposed units. In many ways, this is an arbitrary classification scheme and it should be emphasized that there is a clear interdependence between the five categories utilized here.

Establishment. A statewide network of regional units is to be established by statute, preferably mandatory, rather than by administrative regulation passed by the state education agency. And, this preferred legislative endorsement should follow the completion and full display of a comprehensive statewide study which would highlight the existing and projected needs of the total state school system, and the existing and projected problems, limitations, and constraints of the present operating units of school government. All local school districts in the state must be members of the regional unit although participation in the programs and services of the unit is not required for the optional programs offered by the unit.

The governing board of the state education agency is to be granted final approval authority to organize the establishment of the regional units. In this activity, the state board would utilize detailed minimal and optimal criteria which reflect the important considerations of total student enrollment, financial resource capabilities, and geographic area peculiar to the state. Local school district boundaries should be utilized as the building blocks for the service unit and not county political lines or other artificial boundaries. Moreover, the boundaries of the regional

units should adhere closely to those of other established or planned public sub-state regional planning, economic development, and/or other programming units subject to the previously established minimal and/or optimal criteria for the enrollment and financial resource base of the educational service unit.

The state education agency is to be granted specific legislative, or at a minimum, specific policy authorization to develop departmental rules and regulations for the administration and operation of the service units. Furthermore, the state education agency should be charged with the responsibility to conduct regular comprehensive reviews of the operations of the regional units.

Governance and Organization. In the proposed model, the regional units would be governed by a popularly elected board having authority to develop its own rules and regulations subject to the policies of the board of the state education agency and/or the state education agency, and statutory and constitutional considerations. The governing board is empowered to appoint its chief administrative officer and upon his recommendation, approve the appointment of other staff members.

Of most importance to the delicate check and balance system built into the model which is being briefly portrayed here, the governing board of the regional unit is statutorially required to establish a general advisory committee composed of one elected representative from each constituent local school district governing board and the chief administrative official of each constituent local school district. This statutorially constituted advisory group is granted statutorial authority to approve certain

provisions of the budget of the regional unit. Authorization to appoint other advisory groups composed of representatives of local school districts and other important publics of the regional unit is statutorially encouraged.

Financial Structure. In the proposed model the governing board of the regional service units is granted limited authority to levy taxes. The degree of limited taxing authority would of course depend on a whole set of variables present in a state, such as the percent of state aid to local districts, and dependency on the local property tax. The units are able to make application for and expend federal aid, and receive and expend gifts and grants, all subject to approval of the state education agency. Of importance, they are eligible for and should receive substantial state aid on an equalization basis, particularly for the performance of administrative functions for the state education agency, and for the implementation of state-decreed programs and services which are placed under their sole responsibility or for those where they share responsibility with other units of school government.

Earlier it was established that the model calls for a statutorially mandated general advisory committee composed of one elected representative from each constituent local school district and the chief administrative official of each district would be granted statutorial authority to approve certain provisions of the budget of the regional unit. In that the budgetary act, particularly its planning, implementation and review aspects, is so vital to the delicate check and balance scheme being opted for in the model, a few additional comments about this central feature are offered.

In the proposed model, the annual budget of the regional unit can be divided into three distinct categories, as shown in Table 1. The state

TABLE 1

THE SOURCE OF FINANCING AND REQUIRED APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL COSTS OF THE VARIOUS TYPES OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF RESA UNITS

Type of Programs and Services	Sources of Financing [a]	Required Approval
Regulatory Functions		
1. Administrative costs	SEA	SEA
2. Operational costs	SEA	SEA
Programs and Services		
1. Required of all districts		
Administrative costs	SEA	SEA
Operational costs	SEA and local tax	SEA
2. Optional for all districts		
Administrative costs	local tax	RESA general advisory committee [b]
Operational costs	contract with LEA	RESA general advisory committee
3. Experimental programs for the state education agency		
Administrative costs	SEA	SEA and RESA general advisory committee
Operational costs	SEA	SEA and RESA general advisory committee
Administration of the RESA	SEA	SEA and RESA general advisory committee

NOTE: [a] SEA - state education agency [b] RESA - Regional Educational Service Agency

education agency would provide the entire source of funding and thus hold final review authority for the regulatory functions performed for it by the regional unit, and the administrative costs of programs required of all districts. It would also provide some of the funding for experimental programs and the administrative costs of the regional unit. The general

advisory committee of the regional unit would be the budgetary approving unit singularly for optional programs provided to local districts and share this responsibility with the state education agency with regard to experimental programs and administrative costs of the regional unit.

Regional units would also be required to develop three-year planning budgets. In addition to the many values of this requirement, this time frame is essential for the optimum review and necessary coordination of the budgetary processes outlined in Table 1. It also would contribute substantially to the utilization of program budgeting principles by the regional unit as well as the state education agency and the local school districts.

Programs and Services. In the proposed model the basic programming orientation of regional service units should be in the provision of programs and services to their constituent local schools, all of whom should be eligible for participation. The governing board of the service unit is authorized to offer any program needed by constituent districts, subject to approval of the state education agency.

Furthermore, the governing board, with approval of the state education agency, should be empowered to enter into intergovernmental contracts and agreements with other public, quasi-public, and private agencies for the provision of programs and services including joint staffing arrangements and joint use of physical facilities and equipment. This intergovernmental capability is vital to the workings of the regional educational service agency. Therefore, this authority is explicitly authorized in the legislative framework governing these units.

Regulatory Functions for the State Education Agency. As established early in this paper, it is my contention that viable regional educational service agencies in most state school systems where they operate or potentially could operate can and should serve as an important, but highly selective, link in the operation of the regulatory arrangements which must be maintained in a state school system. It was further argued that the interface between the two roles, regulatory and service, is essential to all three parties in the act -- the state education agency, the local school district, and the regional educational service agency.

Before developing this point further, it should be noted that most of the literature on regionalism in education is either silent on the regulatory-service quandary, addresses the issue only in a peripheral sense, or clearly takes the position that the two roles should not be mixed. One of the first writers in the field to speak to the issue and opt for the position that the two roles ought to be mixed was Rhodes (1963) who assumed that middle echelon units would perform regulatory functions, when he stated:

> The Intermediate Unit localized state school administrative operation, particularly in respect to those routines of a ministerial or 'housekeeping' nature. At the same time, it represents and interprets local education needs at the state level. Through these liaison functions it gives vertical articulation to the state system of public education. (p. 5)

Most recently, a comprehensive study of education in New York State completed last year (The Fleischman Report, 1973) recommended that the existing Boards

of Cooperative Educational Services be utilized extensively in the performance of certain functions formerly centralized in the state education agency in Albany.

In an earlier paper on the regional educational service agency concept this writer (Stephens, 1967) stated in unequivocable terms that these units should "perform a number of regulatory and ministerial functions for the state education agency" and that by so doing they would serve in a "vital role in the vertical and horizontal development and implementation of statewide educational planning and administration of the state school system." (p. 12) Numerous illustrations of how this could be accomplished were subsequently identified. This statement was made approximately six years ago when I first became associated with the concept. Now, after a relatively intense exposure to the concept and its use in a large number of states, I make the claim with even greater conviction.

It should also be noted that while few writings have been offered expressly arguing for the assumption of regulatory functions as one of the main missions of regional service units, the fact is that a large percentage of service units in the several states having them carry out extensive functions of a regulatory nature for the state education agency, especially in those situations where states having a long history of a middle echelon unit of school government who usually performed ministerial functions, have restructured their former units and merely transferred these functions to a new reconstituted unit whatever it might be called. It is not clear in all cases whether or not this transferring of functions was a deliberate and conscientious act or was a necessity due to the unavailability of other arrangements to pick up the slack.

One additional point should be emphasized before offering some hopefully useful illustrations of how the two roles can be mixed. That is, it is essential that the enabling legislation covering regional unit operations clearly establishes that these units are to perform regulatory and ministerial functions. The legitimization of these services is absolutely necessary for the effective performance of this mix, as will be established subsequently.

SOME SPECIFICS ON THE SERVICE-REGULATORY MIX

It is my strong recommendation that the regulatory functions performed by regional educational service agencies be limited to the provision of carefully identified and rigorously protected aspects of the regulatory processes. Broadly stated, this recommendation suggests that the regional unit should be involved in the vertical and horizontal planning aspects of the development of regulatory provisions, and the vertical and horizontal communicative aspects of the implementation of regulatorial provisions. Further, its role is essentially one of data gathering and analysis and the provision of other supportive roles.

I would like now to operationalize this broadly stated recommendation. In attempting to do this I want to first focus on a suggested scheme for looking at the elements and possible division of effort of state regulatory functions, then highlight what I regard as a workable allocation of primary and secondary responsibility for the performance of each element among the three units of school government proposed in the model -- the state education agency, the local school district, and the regional educational service

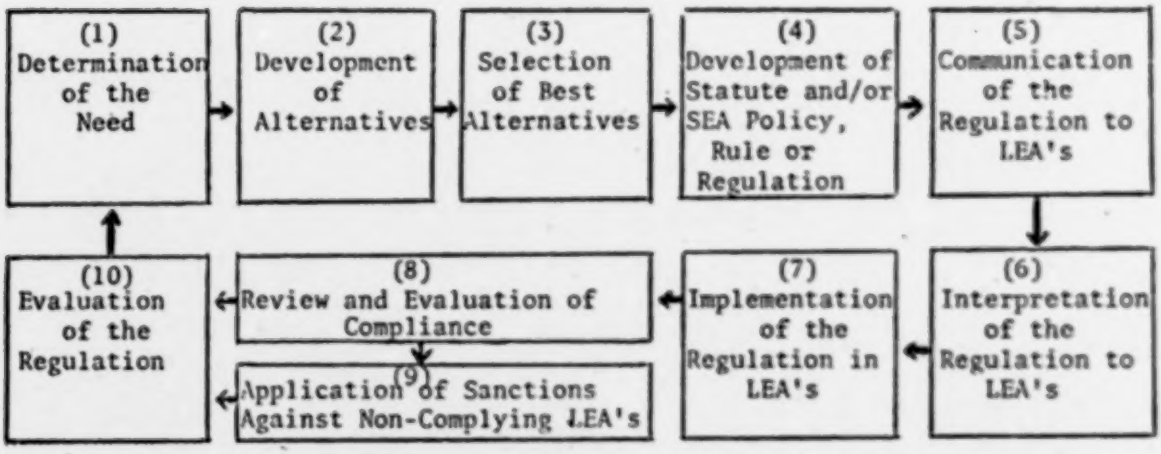
agency, particularly the latter -- and then offer several illustrations of how the scheme might work.

Elements of State Regulatory Functions

A major premise made in this proposal advocating a mix between the regulatory-service functions is that there are a number of basic elements and/or activities associated with a vast majority of state school system regulatory arrangements. Figure 1 identifies one useful profile of these elements for use here. The figure suggests that most regulatory processes can be categorized into ten, typically sequential, activities.

FIGURE 1

A SCHEME FOR IDENTIFYING THE SEQUENTIAL ELEMENTS OF STATE REGULATORY FUNCTIONS


(1) Determination of the Need
(2) Development of Alternatives
(3) Selection of Best Alternatives
(4) Development of Statute and/or SEA Policy, Rule or Regulation
(5) Communication of the Regulation to LEA's
(6) Interpretation of the Regulation to LEA's
(7) Implementation of the Regulation in LEA's
(8) Review and Evaluation of Compliance
(9) Application of Sanctions Against Non-Complying LEA's
(10) Evaluation of the Regulation

NOTE: SEA - state education agency; LEA - local education agency

A Possible Allocation of Effort

Two other major premises are made throughout this paper. One is that most educational processes, regulatory and otherwise, are divisible and that there exists a clear and highly visible division of effort for a vast majority of the regulatory functions of a state school system. That is, while the state has the primary constitutional and/or statutory responsibility for education within the state it can, presently does, philosophically should continue, and in many cases, must for very practical reasons delegate these responsibilities to other legally chartered units in the system.

Utilizing Figure 1, it would appear highly beneficial for the state to assign regional educational service agencies a major primary and/or a major secondary responsibility, jointly with the state education agency and/or local education agencies, for nine of the ten elements identified. That is, with the exception of activity #9, the application of sanctions against non-complying local school districts which must legally and operationally remain the sole prerogative of the state education agency, regional educational service agencies can serve in important lead and/or supportive roles to either the state education agency or the local school districts. Especially promising would be the substantial involvement of the regional unit in the determination of need (activity #1), the development of alternatives (activity #2), the communication (activity #5), interpretation (activity #6), and implementation (activity #7) of the regulation in the local school districts served by the regional unit, and, evaluation of the regulation (activity #10) based on the service agency's close observation and study of its use, typically in diverse settings.

Illustrative Examples of the Role of the Regional Educational Service Agency in the Performance of Regulatory Functions

I want now to cite specific examples of how a viable and healthy regional educational service agency can play an important role in the performance of the regulatory system in operation in a state system of education. An attempt is made to use illustrations of regulatory provisions found in a majority of states at present or potentially will be considered by a majority of states in the future. And, finally, the examples cited illustrate the main thesis of this paper -- that is, a carefully packaged service-regulatory mix is a terribly important objective for all three parties in the arrangement.

The following six major clusters of activities highlight the potential of a meaningful service-regulatory interface:

1. the provision of consultative and technical assistance to local school districts in the development and preparation by local officials of required reports on the fiscal management, educational program, staffing and students, transportation, lunch, and other supportive services provided by the district and the collection, verification, and preliminary analysis of these reports for the state education agency;
2. the provision of consultative, technical, and legal assistance to local school districts in the development and preparation by local officials of required physical facility utilization and/or construction programs and the verification and preliminary analysis of these activities for the state education agency;

3. the provision of consultative and supporting services to local school districts in the development, implementation and evaluation by local officials of required school health programs and services, or the direct operation by the regional unit of these required activities where the local unit cannot justify their provision;
4. the provision of consultative and supporting services to local school districts in the development, implementation, and evaluation by local officials of required programs and services for exceptional children or the direct operation by the regional unit of these required programs where the local unit cannot support their offering;
5. the completion of required local school district existing and projected demographic profiles required for long-range fiscal, educational, staffing, student, and physical facility planning and accountability schemes; and,
6. most importantly, the provision of consultative and supporting services to local school districts in the development, implementation, and evaluation by local officials of required instructional programs and services or the direct provision by the regional unit of these required educational experiences when the local unit cannot efficiently or economically support their offering.

In addition to the above major clusters of activities, regional educational service agencies can also play a vital role in the performance of other

frequently required single purpose activities such as: the completion of required local school district census projects; the completion of required local district drop-out and attrition studies; the management of required local school bus inspections; the approval of school bus transportation routes; the management of compulsory attendance laws; the approval of local school district reorganization proposals; the monitoring of teacher certification processes; and, the management and apportionment of state appropriations to local districts.

MAJOR ADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSED MODEL

In my judgment the proposed model has a large number of advantages for the state education agency, the local school district, the well-being of the regional educational service agency, and the state school system generally. I would like now to briefly enumerate some of the more significant benefits as I preceive them to be. In so doing, I will regularly attempt to reinforce a number of central advantages as I further perceive them.

Major Benefits for the State Education Agency

The model has these known and/or highly potential major benefits for the state education agency in most state school systems:

1. The proposal frees the state education agency from diluting precious and increasingly scarce fiscal and human resources for the operation of necessary programs and services in situations where this is now true or in cases where a state

education agency is not presently operating programs but senses a compelling need to do so.

2. The proposal frees the state education agency to better perform one of its widely recognized primary missions, the companion functions of providing long-range educational planning, the identification of the really big issues in education, and the communication of these needs and their possible solution to its numerous publics by establishing far more elaborate communicative and coordinative networks than are presently available in many states.
3. The proposal will permit the state education agency to substantially improve on virtually all of the elements of its increasingly necessary regulatory arrangements.
4. The proposed requirement that the board of the state education agency be authorized to approve the number of service units in the state better insures that the units which are established are based on carefully developed criteria peculiar to the state, thus minimizing the establishment of marginal or difficient units.
5. The proposed requirement that the state education agency have authority to develop policies governing virtually all aspects of the operation of regional units provides the state with a meaningful and visible leadership role, on the one hand, and an equally critical intervention mechanism on the other hand.

Major Benefits for the Local School District

The proposed model has these known and/or highly potential major benefits for one of the principal consumers of regional educational service agency operations, the local school district.

1. It will make possible the provision of easily accessible and definite supplemental and supportive services of high quality to its own self-determined programming activities.
2. It will facilitate the development of required programs and services and in fact provide these in the event there is a clear inability for the local school district to do so.
3. It will provide a mechanism for the direct and immediate control by local school districts of those aspects of the operations of the regional unit of most importance to it.
4. It will provide numerous opportunities for meaningful local district involvement in statewide and regional planning and decision-making processes.
5. It will promote and protect a viable state-local partnership concept in education which, despite many glaring weaknesses and well-documented limitations in many situations, has nonetheless served this nation admirably in many important ways and needs to be preserved.

Major Benefits for the Regional Unit

The proposed model also has built into it a number of important features for the promotion of a healthy regional educational service agency. Chief

among these are the following known and/or highly potential benefits.

1. The proposal would make the regional unit directly accountable to its two masters, the state education agency and its constituent local school districts, as it must be.
2. The recommended degree of fiscal independence would provide the unit with a definite and reliable fiscal support base to promote the provision of high quality and sophisticated programs and services and the deployment of staff expertise unmatched by its constituency.
3. The proposed performance of certain regulatory functions for the state education agency would give additional justification for the allocation of resources to the unit and this also would contribute to the development of high quality programs and services, in addition to lessening financial competition with its constituent local districts.
4. The proposed performance of certain regulatory functions for the state education agency would also contribute to the image of the regional unit as a legitimate member of the state school system.
5. The proposal would provide the service unit with a desired degree of autonomy from the state education agency, thus permitting it to respond in meaningful ways to the expressed needs of its consumers.

Other Benefits for the
State School System

The model has these additional known and/or highly potential benefits for the state school system beyond those implied in the previous listings.

1. It will contribute substantially to the equalization of educational opportunities for all children and youth by minimizing the accident of geography as an important determinant of the kind of educational programs available to them.
2. It will contribute substantially to the improvement of the quality of many educational programs and services in operation in the state system.
3. It will contribute to the development of a viable structure of school government in the state.
4. It will promote the better utilization of known and/or force a systematic search for new cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness principles in the delivery of educational programs and services within the state school system.
5. It will promote the interface of education and general government and the private sector by removing many legal and artificial constraints which inhibit joint planning, coordination, and cooperation.
6. It will contribute to the healthy interface between urban, suburban, and rural interests as they seek to solve areawide educational and educationally-related issues, where this is appropriate and feasible.

7. It will contribute to the development of a statewide research, development, and evaluation network in the state and promote the concentration of resources to foster the network once it is in place.
8. It will contribute to the establishment of a statewide network of resident change agents possessing the legal mandate, where necessary, and staffing expertise and resources to effect fundamental change in the workings of the state school system on a regular and planned basis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I want to conclude these remarks by emphasizing that the proposed solution to the complex question of the governance and organizational affiliation of regional educational service agencies is comprised of many interlocking aspects designed to establish a delicate check and balance system which is open, visible, and accountable to each of the three major parties in the act. It resembles what Commissioner Nyquist of New York State (Nyquist, 1972) in a recent speech called a "calculated interdependence." (p. 7)

Whatever its proper title, the proposed model addresses and resolves in a resonable fashion most of the frequently competing considerations of the state education agency, the local school district, and the regional educational service agency. And, most importantly, it has as its primary focus the promotion of the welfare of the total state school system, the ultimate test of any proposed scheme.

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